

## Viewpoint

# California trumps rest of U.S. on family planning front

Cheryl Rollings  
The Tribune

Did you know that half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended? Sadly, the United States has one of the highest unplanned pregnancy rates among industrialized nations. This dismal record is the result of lack of access to contraception and lack of medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education, including the misguided "abstinence-only" sex-education programs.

Fortunately for California, legislation was passed in 1992 that expanded family planning services to low-income women and adolescents who rely on publicly funded services for their contraceptive care. As a result of increased access to contraceptive services and sex education, California now leads the nation in reducing teen pregnancies — a 40 percent reduction over the last 10 years.

Recently the Guttmacher Institute released a new study rating California as the best in the nation at preventing unintended pregnancies. The study, "Contraception Counts," rated states on service availability, laws and policies and public funding. California rated number one overall.

As a result of this extraordinary achievement, Planned Parenthood honored two governors, one Republican, one Democratic, who deserve recognition for their vision and leadership in supporting family planning and women's reproductive rights. Their legacies will continue to impact the quality of life for women and families throughout the state for many years to come.

In 1992, Governor Pete Wilson introduced California's model Family PACT (Planning, Access, Care & Treatment) program. From his very first budget to his last, Governor Wilson made pregnancy prevention one of his top priorities, even when the state faced record deficits. The Family PACT program continues to ensure that low-income women, men and adolescents have access to health education, counseling and the contraceptive services they need to reduce unintended pregnancy and improve reproductive health. Family PACT serves more than 1.5 million clients annually and, since its inception, has prevented 93,970 unintended births; 78,620 abortions; 30,310 miscarriages; and 2,050 ectopic pregnancies, saving the state of California more than \$2 billion that would otherwise have been spent on pregnancy-related medical care, welfare payments and social services.

Governor Gray Davis' lasting legacy lies in the 15 pieces of legislation that he signed into law during his tenure that supported women's reproductive health services and protected a woman's right to choose, including the codification of Roe v. Wade into state law.

While here in California we are celebrating the positive results of adopting laws and policies that protect reproductive choice and expand access to contraceptive information and services, other states are doing the opposite.

The confirmation of Justices John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court has energized the anti-choice movement, and momentum to ban abortion is building all around the country. On the desk of the governor of South Dakota, which is ranked 44th by the Guttmacher Institute in preventing unintended pregnancy, is a bill that bans all abortions and makes no exception for the health of the mother. It was specifically designed to launch a direct legal challenge of Roe vs. Wade.

Ten other states (Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee and West Virginia) have abortion bans pending. Across the country, anti-choice politicians are creating a gauntlet of legislation that attempts to put roadblocks between women and reproductive health care. Currently, nationwide, there are approximately 850 pieces of state legislation related to choice — only a small minority of which support women's access to reproductive health services.

While we are fortunate to live in a pro-choice state, we are not immune to the efforts of anti-choice hardliners. In November, Californians defeated Proposition 73 (the Parental Notification Initiative) that would have endangered the lives of teens in our state. However, proponents of that initiative are back collecting signatures to put another parental notification initiative on the ballot. The fact that they just lost that battle in November does not deter them from trying again. They are gearing up for another battle and so are we. We will do whatever it takes to defeat any initiative that put the lives of teens at risk.

Isn't it ironic that those who want to ban abortion do not support the very programs and services that reduce the need for abortion? California has demonstrated what happens when you expand access to contraception and sex education: unintended pregnancy goes down. Teen births go down. The number of abortions declines. Families are healthier. Taxpayers save money. Republican Pete Wilson understood this when he started the Family PACT program. It's unfortunate the right wing of his party does not.

For more information, go to [www.ppsbvslo.org](http://www.ppsbvslo.org).

--Cheryl Rollings is CEO and president of Planned Parenthood of Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties, Inc.